

**Foreword and Introduction to Eda Derhemi & Christopher Moseley (eds.),  
*Endangered Languages in the 21st Century* (Routledge, 2022)**

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It can take a long time before an author or editor can agree a title with a publisher. I recall weeks of discussion over my book that was eventually called *Language Death*. The marketing people were not so sure - 'a bit morbid', said one - but at the time it seemed the right title, for in the 1990s several of those writing about language endangerment felt that the world needed an urgent wake-up call, and a dramatic title in a book aimed at a general readership I felt would add to that sense of urgency. I hoped the cover would provide a note of optimism. It shows a cardiogram flat-lining, but just at the end it flickers into life.

I wouldn't call it that now, and the present volume shows the reason why. It is without a doubt the most refreshingly encouraging take on the issue that has appeared in the past thirty years, and a perfect choice to celebrate the contribution of Nicholas Ostler, whose positive thinking and energetic perseverance in support of the field in general, and of the Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL) in particular, has been characteristic from the outset. Titles again. The editors wanted to capture this incipient optimism by calling their collection 'Holding their Ground', before the publisher turned the subtitle into a title. It is a daring claim, but more than justified by the papers in this collection.

The book has several aims. Its motivation was to give Nick a parting gift, as he leaves his chairmanship of the organization he founded in 1996, and also to celebrate 25 years of the work of the FEL. But the book goes well beyond the role of a simple festschrift. Its seventeen papers provide a wide-ranging snapshot of the state of endangered languages in the contemporary world - including a great deal of historical background - and the methods and practices that have come to characterize the effort to revive and maintain disadvantaged indigenous languages, and the challenges still to be faced. There are also new comparative narratives arising from large geographical areas in which linguistic endangerment has rarely or never been explored so comprehensively. The papers acknowledge the threat of losing languages in an unprecedented way, but focus on cases from the past decade which show evidence of resilience, and - through the efforts of individuals, communities, and institutions - which suggest paths to sustainable progress. It is both optimistic and realistic.

The collection is organised under three headings. The first section deals with the general state of endangered languages today in some large regions of the world, such as Australia, Brazil, Central Asia and Northern Africa, and offers 'some good news'. Several significant developments have taken place in recent years.

- Michael Walsh sets the tone for the volume in the title of his paper: 'The rise and rise of Australian languages'. Despite dire predictions over several decades, the endangered languages of this area are proving surprisingly resilient. Creative ventures (play and film translations) in some supposedly dying or dormant Australian languages, and the availability of post-secondary education in others, are making us rethink the validity of predictions of certain doom. He presents a series of case studies to demonstrate this dissonance between predictions and reality.



- Sebastian Drude and his co-authors review the situation in Brazil, where over 150 languages are endangered, referring to new findings from the National Inventory of Language Diversity and several local surveys. They focus on the language situation in Rondônia, the most linguistically diverse state in Brazil, and make recommendations for sustainable intervention.
- Hakim Elnazarov provides the first comprehensive review of the endangered languages in central Asia, with a focus on Pamiri languages, the most endangered group. He points out that many of the smaller, non-national indigenous languages of Central Asia are being left behind, in an era of globalisation and nationalism, and confined to the mountain ranges, while at the same time, general access to media and communications networks has created global hubs, enabling communication in the mother tongue. Positive institutional change can be observed in the area: many governments now regard indigenous languages as a resource rather than a threat.
- Salem Mezhoud reports on cases of linguisticicide in North Africa, with particular reference to the 'planned disappearance' of Tamazight and other Berber languages across the region. Here too, though, there are positive signs, arising from the influence of international declarations of linguistic rights. He brings evidence from the last decade that shows a more cooperative institutional attitude in some African countries.

The second section discusses the theoretical analysis of factors that support language maintenance, with particular reference to the role of new media, historical materials, intergenerational communication in the home, the classification and measurement of vitality, the role of scholars, and the ethical issues facing fieldworkers.

- M Paul Lewis explores how bridging the gap between language communities and linguists can help sustain language use, using a Sustainable Use Model that allows a community to evaluate and strengthen its own language use. He identifies an additional set of technical planning and implementation resources that are more broadly interdisciplinary.
- David Bradley notes the way governments have in recent times come to view minority indigenous languages as a resource rather than a problem. He focuses on three general questions: Who decides what is a language? Who decides whether a language is endangered, and how much? What should be done about language endangerment? He discusses several examples of how communities and scholars work together, actively engaging with speakers to achieve resilience.
- Tjeerd de Graaf discusses the use of historical material - sound archives and written records - for the safeguarding of endangered languages. He illustrates from a 17th-century collection of data and artefacts from the Russian Far East, supplemented by learning materials produced by the Foundation for Siberian Cultures.
- Riitta Valijärvi and Lily Kahn discuss how endangered language communities have engaged with new digital media such as YouTube, Internet forums, Twitter, memes, podcasts, gaming, virtual worlds, mobile communications,



and Wikipedia. These provide a global platform for languages and for activism, and introduce the languages to new domains, creating a digital community, extending terminology, and supporting investment.

- Mary Jane Norris and Robert Adcock examine the extent and patterns of language acquisition by young speakers when the language is used at home as a first and second language by different generations, based on Canadian census data from 1986 to 2016. They suggest that growing numbers of second language speakers offset the decline in first-language speaker numbers among indigenous language users.
- Christopher Moseley draws attention to the way disparities in the vitality of languages are typically not noted where they cross national borders, in such resources as the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. He points to the forthcoming World Atlas of Languages as a solution, cites examples of cross-border languages of varying status, and discusses prospects for better planning and communication among cross-border communities.
- The section concludes with a paper from Simon Musgrave and Nick Thieberger discussing the ethical issues facing fieldworkers, based on a hypothetical discussion arranged at a conference of the Australian Linguistic Society.

Section three brings together a series of empirical studies towards sustainable language maintenance and use, focusing on advances in overcoming challenges, comparisons that confirm best practices, and sustainable strategies for keeping languages in use.

- Rob Amery reports on sustainable pathways for a fledgling language movement, illustrated by the case of Kaurna in South Australia, where there has been considerable success in reconstructing the language and introducing it into the public domain. He discusses the challenge of maintaining momentum in a revival programme arising out of generational change, the need for leadership, and issues relating to codification and spelling policy.
- Bernard Spolsky describes the situation in Israel, where Hebrew has had to compete with, and been modified by, a range of diaspora languages, notably Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, and Judeo-Arabic. He examines the fate of these languages in the context of a dominant revitalised Hebrew.
- David Nash draws attention to the way homonyms or near-homonyms with existing words have come to denote newly encountered semantically unrelated concepts in some Australian languages. He calls these 'loan homonyms', and recommends scholars of indigenous languages to seek out other instances of them.
- Maya David explores the reasons a community shifts away from its heritage language before efforts are made towards revitalization, focusing on the diaspora of Sindhi speakers. She concludes that revitalisation programmes which take account of the causes of language shift is more beneficial than bare documentation.



- Eda Derhemi contrasts two outlier varieties of Albanian - Arbëresh in Italy and Arvanitika in Greece - with respect to their speakers' linguistic attitudes and the institutional culture in which they function. Different levels of pride and loyalty are related to contrasting levels of historical institutional attitude and support, and indicate the need for state intervention and for a sustainable empowerment framework among self-stigmatized communities.
- Peter Austin describes a legacy project to create an accessible XML-encoded database on the endangered Diyari language of South Australia, tagged for structure and content, to supplement historical dictionary materials currently available only in microfiche. The data are being linked to a multimedia resource containing all published and unpublished materials on the language.
- Marleen Haboud and Fernando Ortega explore the endangerment status of Waotododo, spoken by Waorani communities in Ecuador, as a result of intense contact with Spanish and incursion from mining and oil companies. A shift in traditional values and practices is being offset by activist campaigns to preserve forest lands, language, and culture.

The range of languages covered in this volume, and the theoretical, methodological, and empirical issues encountered, in many ways mirrors the achievements of the FEL over the past quarter-century, and the remarkable breadth of Nick's personal linguistic interests. I got to know him in the early 1990s when he was working in software and management consultancy, and becoming involved in corpus linguistics. When the British National Corpus was being planned, we were both members of its Advisory Council. It was during this period that a growing number of reports made him - as indeed most linguists - aware of the impending crisis of extinction facing the world's languages. With little or no awareness in Europe of the global situation, he decided that the best way of countering this neglect was through the creation of a dedicated organization.

Anyone who has ever tried to create such a beast knows the need for perseverance as well as vision. Nick certainly had both. His first long letter - seven pages - to a small group of linguists proposing the initiative, in late 1994, was full of explanatory background and procedural detail, and asked the crucial question; 'Do you agree that this is a good time to found a group which will spread information on languages in danger and take such action as is possible to defend them?' A flurry of meetings followed the enthusiastically positive response, and a proposed FEL came into existence in early 1995, and was formally established the next year. It was the beginning of a long but immensely productive period of annual international and multicultural conferences, widely acknowledged as a highlight of the endangered languages world and an inspiration to all involved in this area, both at academic and community level. All the papers presented have been published in the Foundation's annual *Proceedings*, and are still in print.

Nick has always been the moral and emotional core of these hugely varied, warm, and intellectually stimulating gatherings. And it is a testimonial to this long period of visionary commitment that colleagues from all over the world have come together to produce this volume - a volume which celebrates not only his contribution to the field, but the work of the many others who have made the Foundation so successful, both as an intellectual enterprise and as a practical campaigning and fund-raising force. And all involved, including the editors and contributors to this book, would certainly want their efforts to be seen as part of a more general celebration -

that several of the languages which gave rise to pessimistic gloom in the 1990s are indeed 'holding their own'. Language death, yes. But language life, too.